

# IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

## Preparation of invoices a snap with 'Timeslips'

It's one thing to keep track of billable time and expenses, and quite another to accurately prepare invoices and reports on a timely basis. "Timeslips," a new program for IBM PCs and IBM-compatible personal computers, does both. It's available from Northedge Software Corp. of Hamilton, Mass., and from many local computer dealers.

Last week in this column, I praised the time-keeping features of Timeslips, and this week I'll focus on the crucial invoice-preparation and reporting features of the same program. After all, if you're a lawyer, accountant, consultant or any other professional who bills others for your time, what good is the ability to easily record the amount of time you spend on each client if you can't just-as-easily summarize the data and prepare invoices at the end of each month?

As you'll see, Timeslips is able to perform these additional functions very well, but it has an important drawback.

Let's assume that all month you diligently used the program to record the time spent on each project for each client. You called up a "time slip" on the computer screen every time you started or finished a task, and you always entered the relevant data as you went along. Also, you created "expense slips" for out-of-pocket costs that are to be charged to each project. In all, let's say you have 50 to 100 slips, each containing dates, times, task descriptions, project descriptions and expenses.

Here are some of the things that can be done using the reporting part of the program:

✓ You can summarize the time spent by client, by project, by billable vs. non-billable time, or some combination. Preprogrammed formats are available for client history reports, transaction reports, summary reports by user, and oth-

ers.

✓ You can display graphs, either on your computer screen or on your printer, showing bar charts of the same data as in the reports. If you have a color monitor, the results are dramatically presented, with no extra programming.

✓ You can design and create invoices for each of your clients with as much or as little information as you desire. This part of the program is surprisingly flexible, and is the highlight of Timeslips reporting capability.

But here's the drawback: These features are impressive but complicated, and may overwhelm the first-time user or executive who doesn't want to be bothered with details.

The reporting part of the Timeslips program is difficult to learn, and the manual is not much help. To get reports and invoices exactly like you want them, time-consuming experimentation is required.

But regardless of the hassles, if you regularly have 50 or more items to summarize, your office would be well-served to have a PC dedicated just for this purpose. If you have under 20, it may be more cost effective to keep doing your record keeping by hand.

*The bottom line:* Timeslips is a very worthwhile program, and has more valuable features than any other time-keeping program I'm aware of. At \$99.95, it's a bargain, especially for professionals who would use it every day. However, it's too time-consuming and bothersome for most executives to personally struggle through the learning and invoice-preparing process.

It's best to have your secretary, administrative assistant or accountant set it all up, design the reports and invoices you want, and then give you just a few simple commands to enable you to record your time. In this way, your organization will get the benefits, and you won't get a headache.



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